

Learning by Doing, Learning for All: Integrating Experiential Methods in Inclusive Education

Verma, Ravi Kant

Assistant Professor, Centre of Teacher Education, Institute of Professional Excellence and Management. Ghaziabad U.P. India

Abstract

In India, inclusive education aspires to offer equal and equitable educational opportunities to all learners regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and linguistic differences. While attempts have been made through the Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act of 2016 to support inclusivity in education, a lot still needs to be done in terms of addressing practical effectiveness. Some of the obstacles to full inclusion are a lack of trained teachers, inflexible curricula, inadequate school facilities, and general low levels of cognitive and social-emotional functioning, especially among individuals with developmental disabilities. Perhaps one of the greatest, most efficient tried-and-true strategies to address these challenges is through experiential learning, or learning by doing. This method of teaching helps students gain new skills and competencies because they acquire knowledge through activities rather than traditional rote learning in class. As stated in NEP 2020, such activities are referred to as ‘experiential learning’ and they include, but are not limited to, project-based learning, field trips, role-playing, group work, and other hands-on activities. Applying knowledge deepens their understanding of the content especially to those with diverse learning requirements. The application of experiential learning in inclusive classrooms assists in the maintenance of differentiated instruction. It reaches the different types of learning, including: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, ensuring that everyone, including those with disabilities, can participate. For example, hands-on activities allow special needs students to learn and practice social skills confidently helping them forge relationships with their peers and fostering inclusion. Group work, arts integrated education, and storytelling are some of the activities that foster collaboration and participation of students from different cultures.

In addition, students are encouraged to think critically and communicate, skills that are important for nurturing inclusivity. Experiential learning helps students not only academically but also in developing their empathy and respect for differences. Students working together on projects or practical work learn how to appreciate and embrace social diversity which helps in social cohesion, something essential in an inclusive classroom.

As with every country in the world, India also has its own distinct characteristics that can be emphasized in teacher education. A crucial aspect is that educators need to be taught these strategies in such a way that they are flexible and serve diverse learning needs. That is, teachers must go beyond curriculum and pedagogy to foster equity by designing appropriate materials, applying assistive devices, and developing inclusive lessons where all students can participate in their respective levels. When teachers are adequately prepared, through professional development, to address the educational needs of all students, they can attend to students from diverse backgrounds, which helps facilitate inclusive education. Such education as part of the curriculum in India serves to encourage active participation in planning classes and structuring learning activities where students are enabled to practice critical thinking and are taught how to appreciate their own being respected through the practice of meeting their needs. By recognizing India has this distinct quality and possibility, is indeed on its way to achieve not only quality education but a fulfilling one for every child regardless of their differences or difficulties. The transformation of education in India has its roots in implementation of good education policies. Improving curriculum, providing quality textbooks, trained teachers are essential elements of a good policy. And hands-on participation through work methods of real work outside of classroom defined as 'experiential learning' should be given top priority, especially when teaching student from low-income families, for whom even simple advanced planning means forbidding them from accessing basic necessities. In India, these features, if added to the existing education policies, would further improve education inclusion that is transforming at a rapid pace towards nurturing and students-oriented approach in equal consideration to body and mind to cultivate holistic development, well aligning with national frameworks toward establishing an inclusive equitable education system.

Keywords: Inclusive education, experiential learning, NEP 2020, learning by doing, differentiated instruction, special needs, Indian education system, hands-on learning, active participation, equity in education, peer learning, teacher training, classroom diversity, policy.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Accepting diversity within a curriculum significantly changes it yielding positive results when all students, without distinction of ethnicity, social standing, or even ability, can participate in the learning activities and are provided all opportunities to showcase their capabilities. Additionally, the inclusive education practices that have been put in place by the Ministry of Education Custom (2021) emphasize the equal access policies and the adequateness of school culture in accommodating each learner's unique requirements simultaneously ensuring that provisions are made for the attainment of fundamental educational standards. Thus, fostering equality and educative opportunities for all stakeholders in education.

In the case of India, there are no known boundaries of implementing inclusive education. The variety of cultures India possess, and even the levels it is divided into, means that there has to be for every religion,

class, gender, caste and even disability focused to be integrated into a curriculum which will be recognized as a valuable addition instead of discrimination. ASER (2023) reported that children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, in particular children with disabilities, struggle to make progress in basic access, retention, and learning structures which is facilitated by existing systemic inequalities and discrimination as the able-bodied children find it easier to get the attention of society.

UNESCO of New Delhi, 2021 estimates that up to a whopping 75 percent of youngsters suffering from chances of having almost 75 percent chances of having a disability leave out of or don't even think of enrolling themselves in mainstream primary provide education schools after the age of a semester which goes far lower than reasonable standards. This fact emphasizes the promote of conceal discriminatory policies enabling adequate social justice and structural equality and irrespective of, the state of constitution in India authorities wishing to be optimistic

about get the benefits from enduring social discrimination arising at the heart of such goals of enabling equal inclusion in education attending social services.

Through its very nature, inclusion education helps foster empathy, tolerance and mutual respect, forming the backbone of any democratic society. Furthermore, it enables students to engage with a diverse world, which is crucial in this modern age that celebrates coexistence (Bhattacharya & Pal, 2022).

Research also suggests that all students, regardless of disabilities of any kind, are able to reap the benefits from inclusive educational settings (NIEPA, 2022). Facing the cross disciplinary challenges of the modern economy and citizenship of the 21st century, inclusive classrooms help nurture collaboration, critical thinking, and social emotional learning on every single student.

1.2 Policies Supporting Inclusive Education in India

There exists a number of policies formulated in modern India that incorporation of inclusive education frameworks approves, and make, implement all throughout the country.

1.2.1 The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 and Added Amendments

In the year 2009, “Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act” was both passed and enacted as law. This act strived to provide every Indian Equal Opportunity Towards Accessing Quality Education. One highlight of the Act is “Section 12(1)(c)” which states that, extractive private unaided schools are also required to set aside 25% of their available seats on a first come first serve basis at the entry level for children who are part of certain disadvantaged groups which include children with disability as well (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009).

With the new changes and directions set out, there is now more focus on accessible learning environments for all learners by instituting barrier-free access, inclusionary teaching practices, appointment of special education teachers within regular schools, and other designated aids (Ministry of Education, 2022).

1.2.2 Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016

The RPWD Act, 2016 represents a marked difference transition from a charity-based to a rights-based approach to disability

inclusion. Inclusiveness is covered in Section 16, which as a fundamental right mandate's inclusive education up to eighteen years of age for all children with disabilities irrespective of type (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2016).

The inclusion of new types of disabilities and the promotion of inclusion of reasonable adjustment, individualized inclusion, accessible teaching materials, assistive devices, and professional aides is introduced in the Act. A recent NCERT (2023) evaluation highlights that the inclusive approaches stipulated by the RPWD Act are implemented in schools only within a framework of adequate structural training of the educators marketed towards parent and community participation.

1.2.3 National Education Policy (NEP), 2020

NEP 2020 continues to strengthen India's focus on fostering inclusive and equitable education. It stresses "no child should be left behind" and underscores the need for prompt identification and intervention for children with learning challenges and disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The major points concerning inclusion as per NEP 2020 are:

- Establishing Resource Centers on Inclusive Education.
- Teaching inclusivity to educators as part of their Professional Development Programs.
- Inclusivity supportive assistive devices, adaptive technologies, and other methods of interface.
- Flexibility in curriculum and assessment frameworks, as well as guided, multi-faceted, and layered learning strategies.
- Multilingual pedagogies designed to enhance accessibility.

In addition, NEP 2020 promotes the strategy of "learning how to learn", which is tailored to learners with diverse needs, especially through exploration and discovery approaches (Kumar, 2021).

All these policies put together strengthen the students' right to inclusive education policies that are meant to be central, interwoven deeply, fundamentally oriented around India's aspirations for education in the 21st century.

1.3 Introduction to Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is a pedagogical approach in which individuals learn by engaging with real-world scenarios, followed

by a cycle of reflection, conceptualizing what they learned, and applying it in relevant contexts. The concept stems from the premise that knowledge creation occurs in the interaction of social situations and the physical environment (Kolb, 1984; Taneja & Pathak, 2022).

In Kolb's theoretical approach, learning does not depend on passive reception and rote memorization students perform active, inquiry-based tasks, interact, collaborate, and solve problems in a way that resembles real life. Common practices of experiential learning include project-based learning, simulation activities, field missions, role-playing, community service, and hands-on experiments (Singh, 2021).

Every angle of focus in NEP 2020 has been centered around promoting experiential learning throughout various levels of education. It suggests restructuring around rote teaching towards a more experienced, competency-based, inquisitively driven exploration. In more recent curricular frameworks such as NCFES-2022's National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage, "learning by doing" is put at the forefront.

Fostering concepts such as higher-order thinking skills, emotional intelligence, adaptability, and creativity," Bhattacharya (2023) et al. claimed all define experiential learning." Such normative changes are necessary in today's world given how quickly it seems to be changing. Supporting numerous pathways to learning allow students with differing abilities, interests, and experiences to meaningfully engage, bridging the widening gap in society.

Experiential learning methods also allow for unprecedented personalization. Through appreciation of prior knowledge, active engagement, identity, and deep respect for learners' experiences, inclusion is guaranteed (NIEPA, 2022). Language barriers, socio-economic gaps, and the vast array of learning needs within Indian Classrooms can all be simplified through diverse instructional applications.

1.4 Importance of Integrating Experiential Learning for True Inclusion

For India, adjusted policies fused with frameworks of blended inclusive education have the potential to transform teaching and learning systems across the board. From relying on lecturing to using texts almost exclusively, incorporation of varied

strategies to support the diverse needs of learners is non-negotiable in fostering optimal learning environments (Mehta & Saxena, 2023). Multimodal ways to access information need to be accompanied with movement, not restricted to textbooks.

For example, students with disabilities stand to gain the most from applied methods. Children and young people with visual impairments can participate in a variety of tactile and sound-based projects while those with cognitive impairments can succeed at simpler tasks that are physical in nature (NCERT, 2023). All students can be engaged meaningfully through less structured definition of work. This ensures that everyone takes part and appreciates the activities.

Experiential learning enhances social inclusion. Group work, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and participation in other community activities facilitate interaction among learners from different social strata. This promotes empathy while reducing bias and improves teamwork (Kumar & Sharma, 2022).

Such approaches to learning also foster social-emotional skills needed to ensure inclusivity in classrooms. Reflective

journaling, role-playing, and community service help develop self-awareness, empathy, resilience, and responsible decision-making in individuals. According to the National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA, 2022) programme, these are important capabilities for school-aged children.

Transformation requires proper readiness of the teachers. All courses offered to pre-service and in-service teachers should include hands-on learning aligned to inclusion principles. Specialized training on teaching through activity, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiated teaching, and assistive technologies should be basic in teacher education programs (SCERT Delhi, 2022).

Finally, experiential learning aligns with India's broader educational and developmental goals. It supports *Sustainable Development Goal 4*—inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all—by making learning accessible, participatory, and meaningful (UNESCO New Delhi, 2021).

Thus, the integration of experiential learning within inclusive education offers a powerful strategy to create vibrant, equitable, and

learner-centered classrooms that uphold the rights and dignity of every child in India.

2. Indian Policy Framework Supporting Inclusive Education

2.1 Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act of 2009 added a new chapter in educational policies in India. It became a fundamental right to receive an education for children in the age bracket of 6 to 14 years. Notably, the RTE Act also focuses on the provision of schooling on a quality basis as well as equity in education at all levels. 'Section 3' of the Act states the free education clause, while "Section 12(1)(c)" obliges private non-aided schools to set aside a quarter of positions for pupils, who with disabilities and other children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Ministry of Education, 2009). Within the Indian scenario characterized by wide socio-economic and ability inequalities, the RTE Act marked the onset of the journey to develop inclusive classrooms. It shifted the focus from simple enrollment to actual engagement of all children irrespective of their ability in the process of learning. Nonetheless, some scholars highlighted issues related with implementation of RTE

such as supporting special educators, providing infrastructure that is accessible, and adapting curriculum appropriate for students with special educational needs (Singh and Shah, 2022).

It can be concluded that even though the RTE Act has defined the boundaries of inclusion as a fundamental right, increasing policy attention in this area is necessary if the goals of the policy are to be achieved.

2.2 Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016

Incorporating principles from global treaties like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), India put in place the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act in 2016. The RPWD Act broadened the definition of disabilities from 7 to 21 categories and reinforced policies of universal education at all levels.

Section 16 of the Act specifies the responsibilities of the government and educational institutions, which include:

- Ensuring school infrastructure is accessible,
- Provision of reasonable adjustments,
- Employment of special teachers,

- Training of teachers in inclusive methodologies,
- Participation in extracurricular activities (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2016).

Active involvement and participation are what the RPWD Act offers; rather than passive integration into school systems, it offers active support and scaffolding to disabled individuals within the education system. Moreover, it also remarks on the need for individual education programs (IEPs) for children with disabilities stating the requirement for tailored educational frameworks.

Despite the efforts made to boost understanding of the RPWD Act, the Annual Report of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (2023) highlights the persisting challenges of inadequately trained staff, absence of necessary assistive devices, and poorly designed school infrastructure, especially in rural regions of India.

With all the components necessary for legislation to be enacted, the focus now needs to be on tangible implementation strategies that will address real world challenges.

2.3 National Education Policy (NEP), 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has restructured the Indian education system with special focus on equity, inclusiveness, and intensified and hands-on learning. NEP represents a shift in approach as it considers that the increasing diversity of learners within a classroom is not an impediment to learning, but rather a rich resource for learning.

NEP Chapter 6, "Equitable and Inclusive Education," lays out the following strategies:

- Target Group – socio economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs),
- Education without barriers – access and refusal of gatekeeping to education for children with disabilities,
- Establishment of resource centers at the block level,
- Creation of digitally accessible learning resources,
- Promotion of flexible, hands-on, multi-faceted, and multi-disciplinary modalities of teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Also, strike attention with NEP 2020 stressing the importance of curricular adaptation to fit various placements of learning styles, which is fundamental to the backbone of all participatory approaches

such as learning through doing, integrating the arts, vocational activities, or even working with peers.

Recent research (Kumar & Sinha, 2023) observes that NEP 2020 has renewed optimism towards truly inclusive classrooms by stating that “it is the education that should be modified to fit the child’s needs” which is perfectly compatible with concepts of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which is being slowly infused in teacher training courses across India.

Therefore, NEP 2020 needs significant funding in infrastructure development, teacher professional development, and holistic curriculum change while providing a visionary framework to follow.

2.4 Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

Samagra Shiksha is a comprehensive scheme that combines levels of education from pre-primary to senior secondary, launched in 2018 (Department of School Education and Literacy, 2023). As per Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, it aims to promote inclusive and equitable quality education.

The program integrates three pre-existing programs (SSA, RMSA, Teacher Education) and emphasizes on inclusive education by:

- Providing financial support for aids and appliances,
- Facilitating resource rooms in schools,
- Appointing special educators,
- Conducting teacher and parent awareness programs,
- Promoting home-based teaching for children with severe disabilities.

With the goal of strengthening support efforts, the Samagra Shiksha 2.0 guidelines (2023) ensure that aid is perpetually availed to encourage the retention of students with special needs.

The ASER Pratham Report (2023) highlights a growth in enrollment for children with disabilities under SSA; however, a decline in their learning outcomes poses a problem that requires experiential teaching-based pedagogical reform.

2.5 Other National Initiatives

Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS)

At the secondary level (Classes IX-XII), the IEDSS scheme offers financial assistance to schools for integrating disabled pupils. The scheme covers costs such as the employment of special education teachers, accessible

guided materials, transport facilities, and assistive technology.

While the IEDSS system may have promise, NCPEDP (2023) claims that monitoring mechanisms need improvement to ensure that funding directly improves educational experiences instead of just meeting infrastructural requirements.

PM SHRI Schools (2022)

The Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI) program intends to upgrade more than 14,500 schools into vision schools by the year 2027. One of the main mandates is inclusiveness and the provision of physically unimpeded infrastructure and learners including adaptive teaching tools and aid (Ministry of Education, 2022).

As outlined in the guidelines, the further inclusivity within the incorporation of PM SHRI Experiential instructions guided by the Principles of Teaching Methods II consists of a flexible and personalized system that ensures hands-on participation into every level.

3. Understanding Experiential Learning

3.1 The Philosophy of "Learning by Doing"

The philosophy of 'experiential learning' is associated with the term 'learning by doing'—

that is to say, having one actively take part in processes of the learning experience as opposed to being an audience that passively receives information. This notion has been based on the ideas of several educational theorists, the most famous being David A. Kolb, who in 1984 proposed what came to be known as the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT).

Learning is defined by Kolb as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984) which he depicts within a four-stage cyclic model of learning

- i). Concrete Experience: Partaking in doing an activity.
- ii). Reflective Observation: Watching and pondering upon a particular experience.
- iii). Abstract Conceptualization: Evaluating an event and creating potential explanations.
- iv). Active Experimentation: Integration of what was taught into novel situations.

Experiential learning in Indian education remains a relatively new concept increasingly sought after incorporating practical engagement for skill development. Such traditional practices, like rote memorization, are widely adopted across Indian schools.

Learning by doing goes beyond acquiring knowledge—it ensures students build 21st century relevant skills, developing practical, emotional, and essential intelligence as they engage with the material.

The NEP proposes the integration of experiential learning in all steps of education from primary school and encourages Indian educational institutions to shift towards inclusive, holistic, and centered around fostering creativity (MHRD, 2023).

3.2 Forms of Experiential Learning

Experiential learning can come in many forms and at a particular age, the context, and the learning objectives, some of the most efficient include:

3.2. Projects Based Learning

In Project-Based Learning, students work collaboratively for an extended period of time on a project or designed a project to solve a real-world issue, or to answer a complex question. The public product or presentation serves as the culmination of the project.

Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL) encourages students to develop projects in app development, robotics, and environmental conservation which fosters a scientific temper in students. Such initiatives are a part

of the NITI Aayog (2023). Project Based Learning (PBL) is an emerging approach encouraging and enhancing critical thinking, collaboration, communication skills, and making learning more contextual and meaningful (Patel & Joshi, 2022).

3.2.2 Field Visits

Field visits are an excellent way for students to learn about concepts beyond the four walls of the classroom, including museums, industries, farms, historical sites, and scientific laboratories. Heritage Walks offer an excellent example whereby the combination of field learning with history and civic education is effectively done, especially in Delhi and Jaipur. Experiencing history ‘on location’ helps with the internalization of abstract concepts and serves to enhance one’s appreciation of the subject emotionally (Gupta, 2023).

3.2.3 Simulations and Role-Plays

The term simulation refers to the creation of an environment, which resembles a real-world scenario. Different personas can be adopted through role-play. In Indian schools and colleges, Model United Nations (MUNs), courtroom mock trials, and business management simulation games have become popular, teaching negotiation, empathy, and

strategic decision-making (Mukherjee, 2022). Role-play and simulations are powerful tools, especially in enhancing the soft skills, leadership, and moral judgment of learners.

3.2.4 Group Activities

Through peer-to-peer learning activities like group debates, brainstorming, and team challenges, learners are likely to learn from one another. Group activities aid in the expression and articulation of numerous perspectives, hence, promoting a democratic culture in the classroom.

Structured group work executed in Indian classrooms enhances scholarly productivity and social functioning among peers, especially those belonging to marginalized groups, as noted by Bansal and Srivastava (2023).

3.2.5 Storytelling, Arts, and Theatre-Based Education

For younger children and for learners with different abilities, integration of the arts like storytelling, theatre, and painting, as well as music, helps to profoundly strengthen learning. In rural India, organizations like Gramya Manthan and Akshara Foundation apply storytelling and theatre to teach

environmental concern and gender sensitivity (Akshara Foundation, 2023).

Fostering creative arts in the curriculum allows students to portray their true selves, enhances cultural understanding, and supports multiple intelligences as claimed in Gardner's multiple intelligence theory (Gardner, 2011).

3.3 Advantages of Experiential Learning Over Traditional Rote Methods

Focusing on repetitive practice and rote memorization is a concept widely used in education in India without critical engagement to the content. The benefits of the concept of engaging learning are numerous.

3.3.1 Deep Learning and Retention

Experiential methods pairing learning with real-life activities better anchor understanding and leads to improved retention. Researchers contend that students remember as much as 90 percent of material when actively participating in an activity, as opposed to passively reading it which only results in a 10 percent recall (National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT], 2023). Experiential learning promotes long-term connections that soak up the sight, sound, touch, and active

motion of limbs and engagement of the whole person.

3.3.2 Development of Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

All these are 21st century skills essential for modern workplaces (World Economic Forum, 2023). These skills can be attributed to the fact that, unlike other rote rehearsal techniques that encourage and reward level-one surface recall, active learning approaches require analyzing, decision-making, and problem-solving without guidance.

3.3.3 Inclusivity and Personalization

Experiential learning accommodates diverse learning modalities (visual, kinesthetic, auditory, and verbal) due to the many ways of expression allowed. Personalized education becomes more inclusive for the child with disability as well as those from linguistically or socio-economically marginalized groups (Sharma & Yadav, 2022). Story-telling, for example, works great for students with learning disabilities while pupils who are unable to understand texts can be helped with simulations.

Projects with group collaboration, role-plays alongside storytelling sessions build empathy, cooperation, and emotional skills, which are hardly found in a rote learning

approach. Students learn to respect a multitude of diverse cultures, acceptance of leadership, and conflict resolution through collaboration.

3.3.5 Bridging the Gap between Theory and Action

“Experiential” learning helps to unite the gap between the theoretical components of something and putting it into practice. Students learn not only what is done, but also how and why it is done. This is particularly important regarding vocational and professional course work where practical exposure increases prospective employment opportunities (AICTE, 2023).

4. The Function of Experiential Learning in Classrooms with and without Disabilities

Classrooms that fall under the umbrella of inclusive education are designed to guarantee all students, regardless of their different levels of ability and social background, receive equal, tailored support and have access to the benefits of education. In this type of classroom, where there is a range of ability and learning variance, experiential learning stands out as particularly effective. This type of learning not only makes the lesson engaging, but also supports other

forms of instruction, taking into consideration all child's unique learning requirements and strengths.

4.1 Supporting Differentiated Instruction for Diverse Learning Needs

Differentiated instruction is one of the major pillars of inclusive education which is defined as the act of adjusting the method, approach, materials, and even evaluation to suit the needs of every student. Most, if not all, students given in an inclusive classroom will possess a variety of learning ability, interests and styles. Experiential learning, owing to its hands-on, engaging, and flexible nature, is perfectly suited.

Through projects and real-world tasks that enable multiple avenues of participation, every student can meaningfully engage with the learning process through experiential learning. Teaching is more effective when educators design different approaches to a lesson, session, or activity that aligns with a student's specific developmental level, interests, and educational profile, which is often referred to as differentiated instruction. For example, students with different cognitive capabilities can be given varying degrees of supportive scaffolding, which allows all students to demonstrate

understanding and interact with the content through engagement at their own pace.

Along with other types of experiential learning, such as project-based learning and field-based learning, some teaching strategies can be tailored to allow students with certain disabilities, including visual or hearing impairments, to actively participate using appropriate materials or methods (Sharma & Yadav, 2022).

4.2 Accommodating Multiple Learners: Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic

In a typical classroom, students possess a variety of learning styles from visual to auditory to kinesthetic. Experiential learning can best meet these differences, and as Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) states, learning occurs most effectively when the learner engages actively with the content through multiple senses.

- Visual learners benefit from activities such as interactive diagrams, visual storytelling, and multimedia presentations that allow them to see concepts in action.
- Auditory learners thrive in settings where they can engage in discussions, debates, or role-play activities that involve speaking, listening, and hearing information.

- Kinesthetic learners excel in activities that involve physical movement, such as hands-on tasks, role-plays, or field visits that provide real-world context to the concepts being studied.

By incorporating these diverse learning modes, experiential learning not only enhances academic understanding but also helps build confidence and competence in students with diverse needs (Bansal & Srivastava, 2023). This approach ensures that every student has an opportunity to succeed in a way that resonates with their personal learning preferences.

4.3 Enhancing Peer Collaboration, Social Skills, and Empathy

An advantage of experiencing learning is its focus on cooperative activities. Group interactions of role plays, simulations and project work allow for vertical interactions and learning through teaching among peers. Such cooperative work is useful for special needs students because it contributes to a feeling of acceptance and inclusion for these learners in the classroom.

These interactions are crucial to building social not only because they need to learn skills of appreciating one another, but also develop different social skills such as

understanding. In classrooms mixing different levels of abilities, the social integration which can be encouraged at all levels takes place when learners of diverse capabilities come together to work towards one goal. In the collaboration among students working on the different tasks, there is acquisition of communication, ability to work in teams, problem solving and many other aspects that aid in comprehensive development.

Students with autism, dyslexia, and other learning challenges are given opportunity to socially engage with their classmates through the use of group activities in experiential learning. Such experiences allow students to participate in the educative process of each other in a less formal way which helps in their social and emotional development. This is crucial especially in the case of Indian education systems where the schools become the major means of promoting social integration among students of different cultures.

4.4 Boosting Confidence and Self-Efficacy in Students with Special Needs

Experiential learning is particularly important in building self-esteem and self-efficacy in students with special needs. For

children who may struggle in traditional, lecture-based classrooms, the hands-on, active nature of experiential learning allows them to demonstrate competence and mastery in a non-threatening, supportive environment.

For example, a student with learning disabilities may struggle with traditional exams but could excel in group projects or practical demonstrations. Such success can have a powerful impact on their self-worth and motivation to engage with further learning. This is particularly true in inclusive classrooms, where students of all abilities can contribute to the success of group tasks, fostering an environment of shared achievement.

In Indian schools, where students with disabilities often face stigma or low expectations, experiential learning provides a platform for them to showcase their strengths, thus challenging societal stereotypes. Furthermore, when these students see their peers recognizing their contributions, it boosts their confidence and sense of agency (Gupta, 2023).

4.5 Case Examples of Activity-Based Learning in Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Schools

The incorporation of activity-oriented learning in the curriculum of Indian government schools such as Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) and Navodaya Vidyalaya (NVs) has been on the rise. These schools cater to a wide range of learners, including those from low-income families as well as disabled children. Inclusion in education not only aims to remove barriers, but also makes use of all forms of experiential learning to actively engage every learner.

For instance, in Kendriya Vidyalayas, project-based learning is complemented with field trips to apply concepts learnt in class. In other subjects like science, learners perform a variety of practical experiments and activities which enhances both the action and thinking skills of the students. The problem-solving and interpersonal activities designed for diverse-ability students go beyond the cognitive development and skill enhancement frameworks of the school curriculum.

In contrast, creative arts and drama are also incorporated into the education curriculum in Navodaya Vidyalayas, which embraces the holistic approach to education. Students participate in dramatization and creative art activities which offer abundant expressive

learning opportunities, promoting not only imagination, but also empathy. Students with special educational needs (SEN) are able to communicate and interact using means that are often not available through traditional instruction (Bansal & Srivastava, 2023).

Both of these models demonstrate the potential of inclusive pedagogy to draw upon experiential learning approaches to create a more inclusive, community-oriented and participatory environment, by addressing, in particular, the needs of marginalized students. These instances from Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas harmonize how activity-based learning could make education inclusive and enable children to learn in multiple ways.

Experiential learning is a foundation for inclusivity—for enabling all students, regardless of their learning needs or abilities, to participate in and experience a meaningful education. By developing individual learning needs, peer collaboration, and confidence in students with special needs, experiential learning helps to create more equitable, inclusive and dynamic learning environments. Both that gap in learning and that social cohesion, and that agility that comes from teaching people in an

experimental way that lets them do things, are all things that the other covers.

5. Challenges in Implementing Experiential Learning in Inclusive Education

Despite the many potential benefits of experiential learning for inclusive education, there are a number of obstacles that prevent these from being realized in Indian classrooms. These barriers are grounded in the educational system, poor teacher training and resistance to change in conventional teaching practices. In order to address these challenges, the barriers to implementing ILE can be explored.

5.1 Lack of Trained Teachers

Lack of appropriately trained teachers is, thus, one of the serious lack of teachers exerts itself as a major stumbling block in implementing active experiential learning in inclusive classrooms. In the facilitation of experiential learning, teachers are the "key players in the provision of interactive, hands-on experiences for all students". But a large number of teachers in India, especially in schools in remote and underprivileged areas, do not possess the skills or the knowledge required to integrate experiential learning in their teaching.

Although teachers generally are taught to lecture or teach out of a textbook, they may not have received professional development to learn how to differentiate instruction, teach inclusively, or use experiential learning approaches. Consequently, teachers faced challenges in differentiating lesson content for students with different levels of aptitude, which hindered the development of an inclusive learning environment. 6 National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) claims that programmes for the training of teachers need to be restructured to enable teachers to develop appropriate tools to implement inclusive and integrative learning programmes, which will pave way for: A suitable modification, accommodation to suit varied learning situations and experiential teaching methodologies (Patel, 2022).

5.2 Overcrowded Classrooms

India's education system is grappling with overcrowded classrooms, which poses a significant challenge to the successful implementation of experiential learning. In many schools, especially in urban areas or public institutions, the student-to-teacher ratio is alarmingly high, often exceeding 40-50 students per class. Such large groups make it difficult for teachers to provide

individualized attention, which is a cornerstone of experiential learning.

Experiential learning requires small group activities, discussions, and project-based assignments, where students can actively participate and engage with the content. However, in overcrowded classrooms, it becomes increasingly difficult for teachers to facilitate these activities effectively. Large class sizes can also hinder the peer collaboration that is essential for experiential learning, as it is harder to ensure that every student has the opportunity to contribute and interact meaningfully with their peers.

5.3 Limited Resources and Infrastructure

Another key challenge to implementing experiential learning in inclusive classrooms is the limited resources and infrastructure available in many Indian schools. Experiential learning often involves hands-on activities, field trips, project work, and the use of technology, all of which require appropriate resources. However, many schools, especially those in rural and underserved areas, lack the physical infrastructure, teaching aids, and digital tools necessary for effective experiential learning. For instance, field trips and outdoor activities, which are essential components of

experiential learning, may not be feasible due to financial constraints or the lack of transportation facilities. Additionally, the absence of assistive technologies or specialized learning tools for students with disabilities further exacerbates the challenges, limiting their ability to engage fully in experiential learning activities. Research conducted by the Ministry of Education (2021) highlights that a lack of adequate infrastructure in Indian schools remains a significant obstacle to the implementation of inclusive educational practices.

5.4 Resistance to Change from Traditional Methods

Indian education has long been dominated by traditional, teacher-centered methods, such as rote memorization and textbook-based learning. Many educators, students, and parents are accustomed to this conventional approach, which prioritizes exams and grades over interactive and hands-on learning.

As a result, there is often resistance to change from both teachers and students when it comes to adopting experiential learning methods. Teachers may feel that experiential learning is time-consuming or difficult to manage within the rigid framework of syllabi

and curriculum guidelines. Moreover, some parents may perceive traditional methods as more reliable and may question the efficacy of experiential learning in helping students achieve academic success (Sarma, 2023).

5.5 Assessment Challenges

Assessing experiential learning presents a unique set of challenges. Traditional assessment methods, such as written exams and quizzes, do not capture the full extent of what students learn through hands-on experiences, project work, or group activities. In an inclusive classroom, students may have different ways of demonstrating learning, which makes it difficult to evaluate all students fairly and consistently.

For example, a student with learning disabilities may excel in practical tasks but struggle with written assessments, while a student with autism might find it challenging to communicate their understanding through verbal assessments. Developing alternative, formative assessments that evaluate the process, creativity, and application of knowledge, rather than just the final product, can be a solution, but such assessments require careful planning and resources. The need for teachers to develop individualized evaluation criteria for each student can be

daunting without proper training and guidance (Sharma & Yadav, 2022).

6. Strategies to Strengthen Experiential Learning for Inclusion

While the challenges in implementing experiential learning in inclusive education are considerable, several strategies can be employed to strengthen its application and make it more effective. These strategies focus on teacher training, curriculum design, infrastructure development, and fostering community involvement to ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities, have access to meaningful learning experiences.

6.1 Teacher Training: Building Capacity to Use Flexible, Adaptive Methods

Effective teacher training is crucial for the successful implementation of experiential learning in inclusive classrooms. Teachers must be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to design and implement hands-on, project-based learning activities that cater to the diverse needs of students. This involves not only understanding the principles of experiential learning but also mastering differentiated instruction and inclusive teaching strategies. Training programs should emphasize the development of adaptive teaching methods,

such as using assistive technologies, alternative communication strategies, and multisensory learning tools. By equipping teachers with these competencies, they will be better prepared to foster a supportive and inclusive classroom environment where all students can engage actively with the learning process (Patel, 2022).

6.2 Curriculum Flexibility: Integration of Hands-On Learning Activities

One of the key strategies to enhance experiential learning is to build curriculum flexibility that allows for the integration of hands-on activities. Traditional curricula in India are often rigid and focused on theory, leaving little room for experiential learning. To overcome this, educators must design learning experiences that align with curriculum objectives while offering students opportunities for active engagement.

This can be achieved by incorporating project-based learning, simulations, and field visits into regular classroom instruction. Curriculum flexibility also means adapting the content to be more inclusive by ensuring that students with disabilities can engage in activities on equal footing with their peers. Collaborative group work and peer-assisted learning are additional strategies that can be

employed to integrate experiential learning into the mainstream curriculum (Bansal & Srivastava, 2023).

6.3 Infrastructure Development: Inclusive Learning Materials and Spaces

To effectively implement experiential learning, schools need to develop appropriate infrastructure. This includes providing accessible learning materials, technological tools, and physical spaces that accommodate students with diverse needs. Schools should invest in assistive technologies (e.g., speech-to-text software, screen readers) and other specialized learning aids to ensure that students with disabilities can participate fully in hands-on learning activities.

Additionally, creating inclusive learning spaces, such as accessible classrooms with flexible seating arrangements and multi-sensory environments, can help support the diverse learning styles of students. Well-equipped classrooms can foster an environment of active participation and collaboration, which is central to experiential learning (Sharma & Yadav, 2022).

6.4 Use of Assistive Technologies: For Students with Disabilities

Assistive technologies play a critical role in enabling students with disabilities to

participate in experiential learning activities.

These technologies can provide students with the tools they need to engage with the learning process independently and effectively. For instance, students with visual impairments can use screen readers and braille displays, while those with hearing impairments can benefit from sign language translation tools and subtitles in multimedia content.

By integrating assistive technologies into the classroom, educators can create a more inclusive and engaging environment for all students, ensuring that no one is left behind. The use of these tools can also empower students with disabilities to take more control of their learning, boosting their confidence and independence (Gupta, 2023).

6.5 Community Participation: Engage Parents and Local Community in Learning Processes

Finally, community participation is a crucial element in strengthening experiential learning. Parents, local communities, and even volunteers can contribute to the creation of meaningful and inclusive learning experiences. For instance, local artisans, experts, or community leaders can be invited to the classroom for field trips, workshops, or

interactive sessions that bring real-world knowledge and skills into the educational process.

Involving parents in the learning process can also help bridge the gap between home and school, ensuring that students with special needs receive consistent support both in and outside of the classroom. Community partnerships can help provide additional resources, such as assistive devices or funding for field trips, that schools may otherwise lack (Sarma, 2023).

Conclusion

As we have seen in this paper, India is moving in the direction of providing inclusive education as a system goal, by establishing an inclusive pedagogical framework based on active, collaborative, and problem-solving learning approaches. Active experiential learning, which is rooted in the philosophy of “learning by doing”, shifts the focus from rote learning to hands-on experiences that are relevant and immersive, facilitating actual participation and inclusion.

Focusing on inclusion, The Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009, The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016, and The National Education Policy NEP

2020 outline policies for use within the Indian educational framework. These policies not only focus access, equity and quality, but also recognize the pre-requisite of experiential learning that is essential in meeting the diverse needs of students. Policies without action, however, are dead on arrival. There is a dire need to implement effective teacher training, adaptable frameworks and supportive resources for genuinely fostering an inclusive educational system.

Experiential types of learning teach equity, belongingness, and respect for difference. Students learning through hands on activities, project-based learning, role plays, and peer collaboration feels a sense of achievement as well as belonging. This approach guarantees that every student, regardless of ability, actively participates in learning, dismantling the barriers which students often face in more traditional education methods. By using world realities, experiential learning cultivates empathy, social skills, and problem solving. Such an approach to education cultivates an atmosphere where different forms of human beings are not just accepted, but truly cherished.

With India's advancing educational reforms, it is vital to understand that achieving inclusivity takes a lot of people working together. Classes should be designed to cater all kinds of learners, especially students with special needs, which could be done by using this type of learning in all subjects. All teachers need training on how to use these different methods, and schools must provide enabling resources and supportive structures for all students such as experiential learning. Inclusion as a concept in education in India can only be fully achieved when every child, regardless of their status, disability, or preferred modes of learning, can meaningfully engage with the curriculum. It is also important to note that collaborative, creative and real-world application learning is paramount to achieving this goal. Experiential learning or learning by doing in particular can help expand and transform Indian educational institutions into places where students will feel valued, respected, and empowered enabling them to realize their full potential.

As such, Dame cation must be coordinated across all fronts—from policies of the relevant authorities to teaching methods employed by teachers and to community

encouragement. By working together, all sackers can create an inclusive educational framework that caters to every learner's educational needs, ensuring that the future of education in India is both inclusive and transformative.

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